

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-08 (ISO) W
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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9079
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 14757

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EG SHUM
SUBJECT: COPTIC DISQUIET GOES PUBLIC

REF: CAIRO 14314

1. AFP SEPTEMBER 5 CONTAINS FIRST PUBLIC ACCOUNT OF COPTIC UNEASINESS OVER PROPOSED ISLAMIC LEGISLATION. ACCORDING AFP, COPTIC COMMUNITY INITIATED YESTERDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, A FOUR DAY FAST IN PROTEST OVER GOVERNMENT'S AGREEING CONSIDER APPLICATION THESE LAWS. AGENCY SAYS DELEGATION MET WITH ASU SEC GEN MOUSTAFA KHALIL LAST WEEK AND PRESENTED HIM WITH MEMORANDUM OUTLINING COPTIC VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT. REPORTEDLY, COPTS ARE CONCERNED PARTICULARLY OVER POSSIBLE PASSAGE OF APOSTATE BILL, SINCE NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS HAVE MADE NOMINAL CONVERSION TO ISLAM IN ORDER MARRY MUSLIM WOMEN. IF BILL PASSED, INDIVIDUALS COULD FACE PROSECUTION--AND POSSIBLE DEATH PENALTY--FOR BACKSLIDING.

2. IN REPORTING ABOVE, AFP NOTES CHURCH BURNED IN FAYUM OASIS VILLAGE, WHILE NUMBER OF OTHER UNSPECIFIED INCIDENTS BETWEEN COPTS AND MUSLIMS HAVE OCCURRED ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY.

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3. ASSIUT AMERICAN MISSIONARY NOTED REFTEL HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN FROM UPPER EGYPTIAN TOWN UNTIL END OF RAMADAN, WHEN TENSIONS EXPECTED EASE. HE TELLS US INCIDENTS THERE WERE SPARKED BY COPTS, NOT MUSLIMS. INTERESTINGLY, HE SAYS AUTHORITIES SIDED WITH COPTS WHEN SITUATION BECAME VIOLENT. OUR INTERLOCUTOR KNEW OF NO DEATHS RESULTING

FROM INCIDENTS.

4. HE REPORTS COPTS HAVE DISPATCHED EMISSARIES TO EUROPE TO PUBLICIZE THEIR "PLIGHT". INDIVIDUALS, REPORTEDLY, HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO CONTACT UNSPECIFIED ISRAELI EMBASSY IN ORDER OBTAIN AIRING OF COPTIC COMPLAINTS IN ISRAELI MEDIA IN HOPE THIS WILL BE PICKED UP IN U.S. HE NOTED THAT, WHEN ASSIUT'S MUSLIMS RETALIATED FOR INITIAL COPTIC VIOLENCE, THEY ATTACKED PROTESTANT--NOT COPTIC--CHURCHES. (QUESTIONABLE WHETHER CROWD ABLE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CHRISTIAN SECTS.)

5. COMMENT: COPTIC REPRESENTATIVES HAVE APPROACHED GOVERNMENT IN EFFORT PREVENT PASSAGE. WE EXPECT GOVERNMENT WILL ATTEMPT TO DO SO, ALTHOUGH THERE IS DANGER THAT AT LEAST ONE OF SERIES ISLAMIC BILLS INTRODUCED MAY BE PASSED, IF ONLY TO DEMONSTRATE EGYPT'S MUSLIM CREDENTIALS. MP'S WITH WHOM WE HAVE DISCUSSED MATTER, HOWEVER, EXPECT THAT IF BILL (OR BILLS) IS PASSED, IT WILL BE CIRCUMSCRIBED TO EXTENT THAT PRACTICAL EFFECT WILL BE LARGELY NULLIFIED. EILTS

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Message Attributes

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Control Number: n/a
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